

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001388/24
to the Commission
Michele Picaro (ECR)
(19 July 2024)**

Subject: Huge damage to olive and horticultural crops in Apulia following invasions by flocks of common starlings

According to a study conducted by the Department of Agri-Environmental and Land-Use Sciences at 'Aldo Moro' University in Bari, huge damage has been occasioned to olive and horticultural crops following invasions by flocks of common starlings. An average 28.9% drop in expected product yield has been recorded throughout the Torre Guaceto (Brindisi) starling dormitory area.

The starling is a SPEC3 classified species. Since 1994, it has been included in the list under Annex II/2 of Directive 94/24/EC as a species that can be hunted for Portugal, Spain, France and Greece, while under the 2003 Accession Treaty it was added to that list for Hungary, Malta and Cyprus and, under Directive 2006/105/EC, for Bulgaria and Romania.

Italy is the only Mediterranean country not to have included the common starling as a species that can be hunted under Annex II/2 to Directive 2009/147/EC.

In the light of the above, can the Commission state whether it will include the common starling to the list of species that can be hunted under Annex II/2 to Directive 2009/147/EC?

Submitted: 19.7.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Šefčovič on behalf of the European Commission
(21 August 2024)**

According to the latest data reported by Member States ⁽¹⁾ under Article 12 of the Birds Directive ⁽²⁾, the EU population status of the common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was assessed as *Declining* ⁽³⁾.

If in certain locations and in certain periods of the year this species may cause damages to certain agricultural crops, Member States' authorities can apply several measures in order to prevent or minimise such damages, in accordance with the European legislation in force ⁽⁴⁾.

Following a solid, scientific assessment of the problem, priority should be given to the relevant non-lethal control methods, including for example the use of netting, repellents, visual scaring devices or acoustic systems (sonic deterrents with distress or predator calls, soft air canons).

Under the Common Agricultural Policy ⁽⁵⁾, Member States may provide support for preventive actions to mitigate the risk of damages by protected animals, including for protected birds. EU State aid rules ⁽⁶⁾ recognise the potential damage to equipment, animals and plants caused by such animals. Therefore, Member States are allowed to compensate costs of such damages, preventive measures, or support insurance premia.

Targeted and limited lethal control measures to prevent serious damage to crops may also be taken, where justified, within the limits set by the derogation provisions of Article 9, paragraph 1, letter a) of the Birds Directive.

Derogations to authorise killing of common Starlings are regularly used in Italy, including by Region Apulia.

The Commission has no plans to amend the list of huntable species in the annexes of the Birds Directive.

⁽¹⁾ https://nature-art12.eionet.europa.eu/article12/summary?period=3&subject=Sturnus+vulgaris&reported_name=

⁽²⁾ Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 20 of 26.01.2010.

⁽³⁾ The breeding population trend in the EU was assessed as decreasing both in the short term and in the long term.

⁽⁴⁾ Annex II/2 of the Birds Directive 2009/147, according to which the Common Starling is not huntable in several Member States, including Italy.

⁽⁵⁾ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-glance_en

⁽⁶⁾ Sections 1.2.1.5, 1.2.1.6. and 2.8.5. of the Guidelines for state aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas, OJ C 485, 21.12.2022, p. 1, and Article 26 of Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/2472 of 14 December 2022 declaring certain categories of aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ L 327, 21.12.2022, p. 1.